

were young people's primary access point to obtain tobacco products, one would certainly expect the streets to have been much busier after hours.

Ironically, Japan prides itself on being the world's first nation to legally prohibit underage smoking in 1900. But that law gets no attention from law enforcement officials or prosecuting authorities. Between 1991 and 1996, public prosecutors received an average of only five cases of reported violations per year; every case closed without indictment or punishment.

A global ban on vending machines can be included in the forthcoming Framework Convention on tobacco control. Japan's accession to such a prohibition would be welcome. However, many readers will remember that the World Health Organization first recommended national prohibition of cigarette vending machines in 1975. Since that time, the number of tobacco vending machines in Japan has nearly doubled. One factor may be Japan's low crime rates, which generally reduce losses from vandalism for vending machine operators. But Japan's streets cannot be regarded as safe while deadly addictive products are virtually handed to its children on every corner.

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Kazakhstan: PM's "PR department" ignores tobacco

When Philip Morris (PM) signed up former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher as a part time consultant on a three year contract reportedly worth US\$2 million, one of her first tasks was to travel to Kazakhstan, to help persuade its leaders to sell PM a major stake in the state tobacco company. The minister for agriculture proposed selling off only 40% of the company, but President Nazarbayev overruled him and PM got total control over the former state tobacco factory.

Since then, PM's influence has, if anything, become even more powerful, and some journalists, having no doubt learned during the country's recent history to take a cynical look behind the official line, refer to the Kazakhstan government as "the public relations department of Philip Morris". Most outrageous of its achievements, many believe, was when the government decided to designate a day of memory to honour victims of mass hunger in the 1930s, when about half of the population died. It could have chosen any day of the year, but the one selected from the 365 available was May 31. Not surprisingly, since 1996, World No

Tobacco Day has been totally ignored in Kazakhstan. Health advocates, convinced this was not by chance, see it as a classic piece of tobacco industry hypocrisy to use victims of hunger to forget about victims of tobacco.

Representatives of PM have direct contact with President Nazarbayev and he has openly helped them to solve tax and customs problems. When smuggled cigarettes produced in the USA were captured at the airport, the names of the companies involved were not disclosed. Robert May, PM's representative in Almaty, estimated that the state budget loses US\$1.3 million each year from smuggling, and promised rewards for customs officers. When the speaker of the Kazakh parliament called for an increase in tobacco taxes last year (excise tax is extremely low, less than a third of the rate in the Ukraine), the only result was a significant increase in import duties on tobacco imported from Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

There is a great deal of tobacco advertising on television, and streets are overwhelmed by billboards featuring the Marlboro man, together with some "prevention" messages, in which PM appeals to underage smokers to "make the right choice". In the government's draft "Health of the Nation" programme, however, tobacco is ignored.

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India: who's boss in the new world order? Look who's boss now. This advert for a new brand launched by Godfrey Phillips, a Philip Morris subsidiary, portrays a young Indian film director at work on a film shoot. The members of his crew are westerners, and the advert appears to exploit national pride in India's internationally successful movie industry. The cigarette makers said the setting of the advert, an adventurous and challenging shoot on water, fitted with the core brand values of daring dynamism with a spirit of outdoor adventure.

Tobacco's Gulf war against health

No country is too small to escape the attentions of multinational tobacco companies, especially if they have special political or cultural influence. Recent experience shows that even in the comparatively small, albeit oil rich countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the industry is trying to forestall serious action with child "education" campaigns, and to buy political favours with gifts to worthy charitable organisations. Underneath the intended gloss of responsibility and generosity, however, lie the familiar stains of lobbying and propaganda efforts every bit as sinister as those found in the companies' home countries, as shown by internal documents released under US litigation settlements.

Earlier this year, the Qatar Handicapped Educational Centre received a Philip Morris (PM) "grant for charitable institutions" in appreciation of its support for handicapped

people in Qatar, becoming only the second Gulf charitable institution to receive one of these grants. PM says its grant scheme aims to honour institutions that care about handicapped and elderly people in the GCC states. It has not specified whether institutions looking after people with disabilities caused by smoking are eligible to apply.

Meanwhile, a brochure distributed in Oman by the industry's Middle East Tobacco Association (META) to retailers, full of industry language affirming that "smoking is an adult choice", ended with the assertion, "Supported by the Department of Health Education and Information". META, a coalition of companies including PM, BAT, and Japan Tobacco International, claimed the scheme was launched in 1998 with full governmental approval, but on receiving a strong demand for its removal a year later, agreed to drop any mention of the ministry of health in future educational materials. META's response could not resist the repetition of the very essence of the industry's cynical and opportunistic

line on youth education: that whatever disagreements there might be with health experts, "the issue of juvenile smoking is one where there is total accord".

Instructive background information on both types of activity described above can be found in PM's draft corporate affairs plan dated 25 November 1987. Boasting that PM and the industry are "positively impacting the government decisions of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE [United Arab Emirates] through the creative use of market specific studies, position papers, [and] well briefed distributors who lobby media owners and consultants", the plan detailed some of the strategies for continued success. These included cooperation with Rothmans and Gallaher to try to prevent a GCC consensus on tax harmonisation and, interestingly, the need to continue to support "our UAE distributor and his business partner, the finance minister, with arguments and studies".

Fighting further emission reductions and disclosure requirements, working closely with Kuwaiti media

owners to fight the proposals of the minister of health, the need to use organisations supported through sports sponsorships to "publicise the benefits", and strengthening the GCC chapters of the International Advertisers Association, were also spelt out.

Perhaps most sinister, however, were the plans to "[r]ecruit a consultant who can help us monitor and influence the Alexandria based WHO office which helps prepare GCC health plans", and to "[w]ork to develop a system by which Philip Morris can measure trends on the issue of smoking and Islam. Identify Islamic religious leaders who oppose interpretations of the Quran which would ban the use of tobacco and encourage support for these leaders".

Since then, fortunately, WHO's position and infrastructure on tobacco control has been significantly strengthened, and there are also signs of progress in the involvement of religious leaders in support of health. Countries in the Gulf region are relatively free from concerns about employment in the tobacco sector, and their wealth can help guard against undue influence from tobacco money. However, as is clear from current activities and past plans, tobacco companies have no intention of letting health policy take its course in the region, and health advocates will have to fight every inch of the way.

The big disappointment: USA weak on convention

President Clinton is known to be strongly against tobacco, but it remains unclear whether his government will actively support the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). At the first meeting of the working group on the FCTC in Geneva in October 1999, the well prepared US delegation was only in favour of addressing non-compliance with FCTC requirements by consultations and diplomatic means, not by binding mechanisms. It seemed that the American delegation could only accept what was already in place in the USA, or what did not need to be ratified by the Senate. A total ban on advertising was certainly not acceptable for "constitutional" reasons.

The attitude of the American delegation at the WHO consultative technical conference on the FCTC in New Delhi from 7 to 9 January 2000



USA: Virginia Slims find your voice campaign. In what appears to be an appeal to back to roots sentiments, this advert portraying a woman in Africa is thought to be aimed at US African American women. It contrasts with cigarette advertising in African countries where western, especially American, models are often featured.